

THE HERMIT  
of  
THE FOREST



1807



The Yeunit  
of the Forest ~ 1807 ~  
(Bewick's Leaves)



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THE  
Hermit of the Forest,

OR,

*Musing Influces.*

A RURAL TALE

ILLUSTRATED WITH COLOURS



THE  
*Hermit of the Forest;*  
OR,  
WANDERING INFANTS.

A RURAL TALE.

EMBELLISHED WITH CUTS.

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## *The Hermit of the Forest.*

IN the romantic forest of Englewood, which formerly composed a great part of the county of Cumberland, lived a celebrated hermit, whose name was Honestus. He was once a very considerable farmer, possessed of very extensive lands, and of large flocks and herds ; but the perpetual inroads of the Scots, who frequently plundered the northern parts of England, very much reduced him. At last those plunderers completely ruined him ; for, in the last excursion they made on his

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estate, they carried off all his family, drove away his cattle, and set fire to his barns and houses, he himself escaping with great difficulty. See the representation of this deplorable scene.



Coming out of his place of con-

cealment the next day, he had the melancholy prospect of his premises reduced to ashes, and nothing left him but a cow, two sheep, and a few farming utensils, which had escaped the hands of the plunderers; but what affected him most was the loss of his two children, who were carried he knew not whither.— Happily for him, however, his wife did not live to see this sad disaster, she having died two years before.

These misfortunes had so powerful an effect upon his mind, that he determined to take his leave of the busy world, and spend the remainder of his days in a cell, far from the commerce of mankind. He therefore drove his only remaining cow and two sheep into the thickest part of the forest of Englewood,

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taking with him his farming utensils.

Having pitched on the spot most suitable to his wishes, he began cutting down some trees, in order to make a proper opening for the admission of the air, and to afford pasture for his cattle. He then built himself a hut, and was fortunate enough to meet with a spring, which afforded him plenty of sweet and wholesome water. See how hard he is at work cutting down the trees.



He passed ten years in this gloomy and solitary retreat, without seeing or being seen by any human creature. The birds of the air, and the animals that moved on the earth, were the only witnesses of his existence. The skins of the animals

to *The Hermit of the Forest.*

served him for cloathing, and the birds of the air entertained him with their harmonious songs ; for, as no mortal hand had ever disturbed them in these remote and gloomy shades, they were strangers to fear, and therefore, in some degree, made themselves a part of his family. The nightingale would enter his hut in the evening, and lull him to sleep with her plaintive notes ; the lark would wake him in the morning, and the robins would come and feed out of his hands ; the cuckow would remind him of the approach of spring, and the thrush and the black-bird exerted themselves to amuse him.

One summer morning, about the tenth year of his retreat, as he lay in bed, he was surprised with hearing

ing the voice, as he thought, of some human creature. He started up and went to the door of his hut, where he saw two sweet infants lying on the ground, hand in hand, and crying.



Of these two pretty babes, the one appeared to be about three, and the other four years of age. Honestus no sooner fixed his eyes on them, than he was struck motionless with surprise, and the children on seeing him ceased to cry, and stood up.

As soon as Honestus was a little recovered from his surprise, he snatched up the children in his arms, tenderly kissed them, and as soon as he had eased his heart with tears, " My good God, (cried he) great and impenetrable are thy ways, and it is the duty of us mortals to submit! What can those two sweet babes have done, to be thus exposed to famine and death in this wild and dreary wood? Can wicked men, more savage than the fierce and brutal

tish inhabitants of African deserts, have brought these children here to perish? My dear babes, how shall I provide for you? Here is no tender mother to hug you to her bosom! no food that you have been used to! what must be the feelings of your parents!" This brought to his mind the fate of his own children, and a flood of tears interrupted his saying any more at present.

While this scene was passing, the two infants threw their arms around the neck of Honestus, put their cheeks to his, and played with his beard. "My dear children," (said he to them) "you must be hungry!" He then set them down on a seat in his hut, and instantly making a fire, warmed them some milk, and put into it some brown bread; for he had

had found the means of growing a little corn.

It afforded some relief to the throbbing heart of Honestus, to see how contentedly and heartily the pretty children ate of his homely fare.— While they were thus refreshing themselves, he made them up the best bed he was able. It consisted, at bottom, of straw; a few leaves of trees over that, and the coverlid was composed of hare-skins sewed together.

As soon as they had finished their repast, Honestus laid them down on the bed he had made, and they soon fell into a sound sleep, which appeared to him a proof of their having been much fatigued. He strewed their bed with wild jessamines and roses, and watched over them like

like a guardian angel. “How sweet (said he) is the sleep of innocence! These dear babes have no stings of conscience to disturb their repose, nor sins to repent of, no thirst after vanity, pride, or ambition.”

When they awoke, he endeavoured to learn from them what accident had brought them to his hut; but they could give him no other account, than that their uncle had brought them into this wood, and riding from morn to night with them, gave them a piece of gingerbread, and then left them, saying he would come again to them presently; that they sat themselves down by the side of a brook, and there ate what they had, and drank of the stream; that they wandered all night in the wood, and in the morning

morning arrived at his hut, laid themselves down at his door, where he found them.

Though Honestus with great propriety suspected that there was some treachery in the case, yet a ten years absence from the commerce of the world had so effectually weaned him of every wish to converse with mankind, that he could not prevail on himself to leave his hut, to penetrate the wood, and accompany the children to any inhabited village.

However, he acted the part of a parent to them: he gave them the best food he could procure, he instructed them in reading, and taught them, in particular, to pray to God morning and evening, and to return him thanks even for the scanty meals they received. He washed them

every

every morning and evening, at his spring ; he taught them to call every thing by its proper name, whether beast, bird, or vegetable ; and, in that very early period of their lives, made them acquainted with such important truths, as the children of the great and powerful seldom attain to. See how he is teaching them to read.



Honestus would frequently tell them stories to amuse them, and among the rest, one day, related the following.

“ There was a shepherd, (said he) who had two sweet lambs, and it was the principal object of his care and attention to secure them from the ravenous paws of the wolf, who took every opportunity to endeavour to seize them ; but the care and attention of the shepherd prevented the wolf accomplishing his wish.— He never went out, without either locking up his lambs, or leaving his faithful dog to watch them, under whose protection they were as safe as if he himself was present.

“ It happened one day, that the lambs, finding themselves perfectly at liberty, and out of the sight of

their

their guardian, determined to have a ramble over the delightful meadows unknown to their shepherd, and return in the evening. But alas! the wolf was on his watch, and the lambs out of the reach of their protector: he fell on them, tore them to pieces, and devoured them.

“ It will be thus with you, my dear children: should you wander far from this hut, you may lose yourselves in these woods, and no more find your way home, when you will die with hunger and thirst, and thus satisfy an idle curiosity at the expence of your lives.”

They promised Honestus, that they would never leave his hut but in company with him, and, during the time they were with him, they punctually kept their word. These sweet

sweet little children found themselves highly delighted with the birds, who were so tame as to fly round them, and would sometimes even suffer themselves to be stroked by them, for Honestus had taught his children to believe, that it was wicked to offend these winged innocents.

Honestus however observed, that notwithstanding the cheerfulness and good temper of his little pupils, he frequently caught them crying, and repeating to each other, "My dear papa ! my sweet mama ! shall we never see them again !" This apparent uneasiness of the children was the subject of many hours meditation in the bosom of Honestus, who earnestly wished to restore two such good children to their parents ; but this was not to be done without hazarding the possession of his present retreat.

As he was one morning turning these things in his mind, he was surprised with the sound of the horn, the cry of dogs, and the shouts of huntsmen. In short, it was a company of sportsmen, whom a fox had led a prodigious chase through the forest. Here they are.



The found regularly approached them ; and as Honestus and the two children were standing at the door of the cottage, the little ones holding their good friend by the hand, a fox, almost spent and worn out, rushed between them, and took shelter in the hut. This was an hospitable habitation, where the distressed were sure of finding relief and protection. Honestus had scarcely time to shut the door, when the hounds appeared in view followed only by a few horsemen, as the greater part of the company had long given up the chase.

The dogs, following the scent, made directly up to the door of the cottage, which was now shut against them. Honestus was at a loss to conceive how horsemen could reach that place ; and they, on their side, were

were no less surprised at finding a cultivated spot and a habitation, where, they imagined, no human being would exist ; but the sight of two such young children greatly perplexed their imaginations.

Both parties continued looking at each other for some minutes, without attempting to ask a question ; but in the midst of this profound silence, all on a sudden, the two children cried out together, as it were with one voice, “ My dear papa ! my papa ! my papa ! ” In a moment, one of the gentlemen leaped from his horse, and catching the two children in his arms, bedewed their cheeks with his tears, but was incapable of uttering a word.

Though Honestus was by no means pleased with having his retreat

treat discovered, yet he could not but be happy on finding the sweet children in the arms of their parent, for such he doubted not but he was. He desired them to sit down on the body of a tree, which he had felled and placed near the entrance of his cottage.

Mr Simpson, (for such was the name of the father of the two children) being a little recovered from the first emotions, which so unexpected a discovery had raised in his bosom, begged Honestus to inform him, by what means his dear children came under his protection? Honestus told him all he knew of the business, which could be nothing more than what has been already related. Mr Simpson took him by the hand, pressed it tenderly between his, and returned him a thousand thanks; but

but this shall not be all (said he),  
for I will make you happy."

See how they are all conversing  
together.



"It is now a twelvemonth and  
four days (continued Mr Simpson)  
since

since I missed my dear babes. All my inquiries after them were ineffectual. On the third day after I was informed, that my brother lay at the point of death, and wished to speak with me immediately. As I tenderly loved him, I flew to him with all imaginable speed, when he almost turned me into stone with the following confession.

“ You see here an unworthy brother, whom heaven will soon justly punish with an untimely death.—But, ah ! what will be my punishment hereafter ? Forgetful of the ties of blood, I resolved on enjoying your estate at your death, which I could not while your children were living. I carried them clandestinely into the forest of Englewood, where they now undoubtedly lie dead. On quitting

quitting the wood, my horse stumbled, threw me, and gave me a mortal bruise. I cannot hope for your forgiveness; and what shall I say for myself, when I shall meet your children before our Maker, which must be the case in a few moments!"

"Here his voice failed him, he gave a dreadful sigh, and expired. Judge what must be the state of my mind at this moment? I flew from the monster, and hastened to Carlisle, where a company of cavalry were in quarters. The commanding officer ordered his men immediately to mount, and penetrate every part of the forest; but they returned unsuccessful, and I gave myself up to despair.

"I formed hunting parties, with no other view, than that I might perhaps

one

one day discover the melancholy sight of their remains; but how great is the bounty of heaven to me this day, in restoring them alive to my arms! Come, my dear friend, you shall have the pleasure of presenting them to their disconsolate mother."

Honestus insisted on not going with them: he begged earnestly that they would leave him there to bemoan the loss of his daughters, and die in obscurity. However, all his entreaties were to no purpose; they forced him on horseback, and carried him first to a neighbouring village, where they shaved him, and dressed him in new apparel.

Honestus was forced to stay some days at Mr Simpson's, but he refused almost every kind of sustenance, and his friend fearing he would starve

starve himself to death, he permitted him to take his leave, and set out for his hut.

On his return thither, he determined to pay a visit to his former habitation, shed a tear over its ruins, and for a moment indulge himself in bewailing on that spot the loss of his dear children. But the ruins were no where to be found, the ground was covered with a new building, the lands were in the highest state of cultivation, and crowded with sheep and oxen.

He entered the farm-yard, and had there stood some time gazing in wonder and astonishment, when two young women rushed out of the house, each seizing on one of his arms.

They



They had no sooner hold of Honestus, than one of them cried out  
“ Yes, yes, it is my dear father !”  
He looked at them with bewildered eyes, and then fainted in their arms.  
It was a long time after he came to himself before he could utter a word.

At

At last he stammered out, “ Yes, it is my children, whom heaven has been graciously pleased to preserve to close my eyes in death !”

He continued some days in almost a senseless state ; but, by the care and attention of his daughters, he at last recovered, and consented to spend the remainder of his days with them. His daughters told him, that some of their friends had followed the plunderers, rescued them and part of their property, and that the neighbouring gentlemen had rebuilt their house and stocked their lands,

THE END.





